

EDUCATORS IN THE FAITH

Ave✠CruX



Volume 5 Issue 2 | Ordinations to the Priesthood

Office of Vocations, Congregation of Holy Cross



Ave Crux, Spes Unica - Hail the Cross, Our Only Hope!

We in the Congregation of Holy Cross profess this truth as the center of our spiritual tradition, and for 175 years, we have worked to bring the hope of the Cross to schools, universities, parishes and other ministries on five continents.

We are men with hope to bring, yet discerning God's will and taking this step in our lives was not entered into lightly or on our own – finding the right next step often comes by reaching out to a vocation director. Our role is to help you hear and answer God's call. Reach out to us and we will help you discover where God's call is leading you.

CONGREGATION *of* HOLY CROSS
UNITED STATES PROVINCE
OF PRIESTS AND BROTHERS

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Moments of Grace

The entire weekend will be beautiful, but the ordination liturgy will go by very quickly. Before the day you are to become a priest, pick one moment on which you will focus your prayer and attention so that your ordination day isn't simply remembered as a blur, but is instead a vivid snapshot of the graces you will receive on this special day.

Pick one moment to remember lest the whole thing just pass by as a blur. This was the best advice given to me by a good friend and brother in Holy Cross before my ordination to the priesthood just four years ago. Even so, selecting just one moment to anticipate in a particular way was no easy task. Would I try to remember the faces of those family members and friends who had gathered? Would I focus on praying each name that I had selected to be in the Litany of Saints while I lie prostrate on the floor of the Basilica? Maybe I would decide to be intentional about praying the texts of the hymns, or decide how exactly I would pray in my heart during the laying on of hands or during the anointing of my hands with Chrism?

If you know me well, this next part won't be too surprising, but I couldn't decide on just one moment. I chose instead to be present to each moment as it presented itself (and I prayed rather intensely that this plan would not backfire!). Reflecting on each liturgical "movement" beforehand allowed me the freedom to be mindful of what was going on during the Mass of Ordination, and to be open to experiencing not simply what I was supposed to be doing in terms of liturgical choreography but instead center myself in the action of God in this Sacrament.

What follows on the pages of this spring edition of *Ave Crux* magazine are some "snapshots of grace" prepared by our soon-to-be ordained priests: Gil, Joe, Vincent, and Zach. So many unique moments, so many friends and family members influence a man's decision to respond to God's call by way of religious life and priesthood. The reflections you will read may help you focus on particular "moments of grace" in your own call, experiences that assure you of God's presence and help to communicate His will for your life.

Join me in praying for these men, and for all of our men in formation as they seek to use the grace of God in service of the Church and the world, and bring the presence of Jesus to those who are in need of His joyful Hope.

May God bless you,

Fr. Dennis

Fr. Dennis Strach, C.S.C.
Associate Director of Vocations





When God calls

Rev. Mr. Vincent Nguyen, C.S.C.

The idea of discerning a vocation to the priesthood and religious life first came to me after meeting diocesan seminarians who would serve at my home parish during the summer. My interactions with those seminarians first planted the idea that perhaps I could be a priest, though there were other signs. What drew me to Holy Cross specifically, was the letter I received from the vocations office inviting me to visit. I had not heard of Holy Cross beforehand. However, that letter in the mail came

the day after I told my parents that I was interested in becoming a priest. When I was deciding whether to visit, one of the diocesan seminarians gave a piece of advice that I will never forget: "When God calls, God will continue to call." So, I took God up on the offer to visit the Old College Undergraduate Seminary program.

When I first visited Old College, I saw a community that prayed and grew together. It felt like home.

I started as a seminarian during my first year of undergraduate studies. Part of the formation work that happens is ministry in many different places that Holy Cross serves. I experienced a tremendous sense of family. In the many communities that I have been a part of either as a resident or a visitor, I have felt the same family bonds that tie the many different members of Holy Cross together. The differences between the members didn't matter as much, because there was a much deeper bond

of community which tied us together. I have only grown in my understanding of that bond of brotherhood that we share as members of the same community.

This feels strange to put into writing, but I have no grand hopes for ministry. I don't aspire to be famous. Let me explain... I have felt most fulfilled in ministry when having deep conversations with other people, when others ask me if they could simply talk, or when they have questions. Those opportunities to be present when someone else is sharing a deep part of themselves, are what I hope my future ministries allow me. To be in those positions where I can be a listening ear for all. My placement this year at Holy Cross Parish, South Bend, Ind., has been great in terms of preparation for priesthood, because I have had opportunities for those closer conversations, whether visiting with people at their homes, hospitals, or in nursing homes. Those conversations help me put a face to the congregation as I preach.

Ordination seems surreal. There's an excitement about priestly ordination like the excitement of a new journey, but it's more than that. Priesthood is neither the end nor is it the beginning of something. It is the continuation of the journey. I'm excited for preaching and for sacramental ministry. I look forward to the opportunity to bring Jesus to people in a unique way through the Sacraments.

Each of the vows are a way that I am responding to God and what takes priority in life. The vow of poverty calls me to focus my gaze not on material things but rather on the things that truly matter. The vow of chastity calls me to be open with my time and remember that the deepest and most fulfilling relationship is my relationship with God. The vow of obedience calls me not to worry about the future or what may happen, but rather to focus on the ministry in front of me right now.

"The members of the Association are to form but one same family, united by the bonds of mutual charity and the three vows of religion. In this way, Notre Dame de Sainte Croix will grow like a mighty tree ... and we shall sing with David: 'How good and pleasant it is where brothers live as one.'" (Blessed Basil Moreau, Circular Letter 65)

I find this quote impactful because Moreau gives his vision for Holy Cross. He desires that all of the branches – brothers, sisters, priests – be united together. It's a vision that we are still striving for, but the goal is important. Moreau wished for the community to be a family united by our bond of being religious in the same community. There is powerful imagery of seeing Holy Cross as a tree. Trees start as a small seed but can grow into enormous and majestic plants. That hope for Holy Cross is powerful and is something to which we can aspire.



*Rev. Mr. Vincent
Nguyen, C.S.C.*

Born: 4/19/1992

Parents: Hoa and Kelly
Nguyen, Warner Robins, Ga.

College: University of Notre
Dame, B.A., 2014

Graduate Study: Notre Dame,
M.Div., 2019

Entered Formation: 2010,
Old College

First Vows: Aug. 1, 2015

Final Vows: Aug. 31, 2019

Deacon Placement:
Holy Cross Parish,
South Bend, Ind.

“

Notre Dame de Sainte Croix will grow like a mighty tree ... and we shall sing with David: 'How good and pleasant it is where brothers live as one.'"



A Listening Presence

Rev. Mr. M. Joseph Pedersen, C.S.C.

“But we do not grieve as men without hope, for Christ the Lord has risen to die no more. He has taken us into the mystery and the grace of this life that springs up from death. If we, like Him, encounter and accept suffering in our discipleship, we will move without awkwardness among others who suffer.

We must be men with hope to bring. There is no failure the Lord's love cannot reverse, no humiliation He cannot exchange for blessing, no anger He cannot dissolve, no routine He cannot transfigure. All is swallowed up in

victory. He has nothing but gifts to offer. It remains only for us to find how even the cross can be borne as a gift.” (Constitution 8:118)

This quote from the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross distills for me Holy Cross' unique charism and mission in the Church. Along with those to whom we minister, we are disciples who are working to bear our own crosses with hope. I pray that my solidarity with people who experience the Cross will help lead them to the same hope that I

have found in Jesus.

My placement this year as the rector of a residence hall at Notre Dame has prepared me for the priesthood by giving me many opportunities to walk alongside the People of God in their joys and triumphs, and in their sorrows and struggles. I pray that these experiences will help me to be a good shepherd after the model of Jesus. I was blessed to deacon at Mass regularly for the men of the hall. I was able

to proclaim the Gospel, preach, and distribute the Eucharist to them. This sacramental experience prepared me for my priestly ministry.

As I look forward to my priesthood, I am most drawn to celebrating the Sacraments. In those moments, it is clear that Christ is working instead of me. I am also joyful for the brotherhood among Holy Cross priests and brothers, which was one of the things that most drew me to this life. Before I entered the community, I saw Holy Cross men who lived joyfully together, and the witness of their common life inspired me to join them. During formation, our common life provided me with lasting friendships, comfort in difficult times, a sense of common purpose, and true brotherhood.

Another important ministry placement during formation was my time as a hospital chaplain. Many of us have spent time as chaplains during our Novitiate year in Colorado Springs. For me, those were powerful moments of connection with people who were suffering. In that

context, the truth of our motto "*Ave Crux, Spes Unica*" becomes real. I am drawn to Jesus' healing ministry, and especially the way in which listening and presence can transform people's hearts. I hope that in my life of ministry as a priest I can be a witness to the healing power of Christ.

Living the priesthood well is an enormous responsibility and a difficult task. At the same time, I have a lot of peace knowing that Christ, the High Priest, will strengthen and sustain me in my ministry. I see my ordination to the priesthood as an outgrowth of my vowed life in Holy Cross. My vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience are a fundamental part of who I am, and so they cannot be separated from my life as a priest. I hope to serve as a poor, chaste, and obedient priest after the model of Jesus.



*Rev. Mr. M. Joseph
Pedersen, C.S.C.*

Born: 3/19/1987

Parents: Michael and Mary Pedersen, Waterloo, Iowa

College: University of Notre Dame, B.A., 2009

Graduate Study: Notre Dame, M.A., 2011; Notre Dame, M.Div., 2019

Entered Formation: 2013, Postulant

First Vows: Aug. 1, 2015

Final Vows: Aug. 31, 2019

Deacon Placement: Rector, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Ind.



Profound Peace

Rev. Mr. Zachary Rathke, C.S.C.

*“We shall have most to share with others
by dwelling together as brothers in unity.”
(Constitution 4:40)*

I find this to be one of the most challenging quotes in our Constitutions. If our fundamental call is to cultivate the family of God in our ministries and our community, then our greatest temptation will be the opposite: Becoming independent and failing to attend to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

Religious vows involve both sacrifice and gift and help us in our fundamental call. By sacrificing the possibility of marriage, I have already experienced a profound gift: A greater freedom to enter into intimate relationship with the Lord and His Church. This may seem counterintuitive, but we sacrifice one kind of relationship to give ourselves more completely to our relationship with the Lord. The time and emotional energy I might have spent with a spouse has become wholeheartedly focused on

my relationship with the Lord in prayer and in serving His people as a minister of the Church. The real gift and fruit of the sacrifice of celibacy, therefore, has helped me to begin to fulfill the deepest of human desires: To love and be loved.

The connection between the sacrifices and gifts of the vow of obedience has already become evident as well. For many years, I constantly imagined all the possibilities for my life - all the ways in which I could work and use my

gifts, all the places I could travel and the people I could meet. I could find myself constantly taken from the present moment as I dreamt of what could be. This became a real temptation, as I could fail to respond to the call of the present moment - I could fail to serve the people before me - because my mind was so focused on the future. I'm freed to focus myself wholeheartedly on the present moment - on those whom God places before me to serve and to love. In other words, I no longer have to worry about what could be, or about carving out my own future.

The vow of poverty is similar. I find the more I sacrifice my pursuit of worldly goods, the more I am freed to attach myself to God and His Church. Throughout seminary and even now, I have noticed how I can become absorbed in our materialistic culture - constantly thinking about what I could buy, or watch, or consume, next. By recognizing that the vow of poverty requires me to

live with only the necessities needed to continue to serve the Lord and His Church, I am freed to let go of the constant distractions of the material world, so I can be wholeheartedly focused on what matters most.

When I am ordained a priest in the Congregation of Holy Cross, I'm certain I will feel a profound sense of peace. I have desired to bring Christ to people in such a profoundly tangible way, especially in the sacrifice of the Mass. If you have a pull within your heart, heed it! Routinely enter into silent prayer, actively seek to let go of distractions and listen to the wordless movements in your heart. Continually ask yourself: Where does the Spirit seem to consistently pull me? That pull is the Spirit calling you from within. Trust first in that movement in your heart, and only then turn to the mind, asking yourself why God might be leading you in a given direction.



*Rev. Mr. Zachary
Rathke, C.S.C.*

Born: 4/21/1986

Parents: Charles and Anne Rathke, College Station, Texas

College: Texas A&M University, B.A., 2008

Graduate Study: Harvard Divinity School, MTS, 2013; Notre Dame, M.Div., 2019

Entered Formation: 2013, Postulant

First Vows: Aug. 1, 2015

Final Vows: Aug. 31, 2019

Deacon Placement: St. Ignatius Martyr Parish, Austin, Texas



A Beautiful Invitation

Rev. Mr. Gilbrian Stoy, C.S.C.

I have been blessed to have a great variety of ministry opportunities during my time in formation. From teaching undergraduates to organizing a sustainable food co-op grocery store to helping in a residence hall, with a few international experiences thrown in. These experiences have shaped my desire to proclaim the coming kingdom by building up intentional, integral communion and communities. My assignment this year has been a wonderful opportunity to witness the

Gospel alive in a parish setting. It has called me to further give my life so that the Gospel may spark life in others. As a deacon, I am able to preach regularly, which is a wonderful preparation for priestly ministry.

After so many years of formation, I'm simply ready and excited to serve the People of God as a priest. I know that I still have so many areas in which I will need to grow, but I am very excited to begin that life consecrated for service.

One of the most attractive aspects of being a priest is that of a life dedicated to serving others. As Fulton Sheen described in his book, *A Priest is Not His Own*, the priest's pursuit of holiness is inseparable from his giving his life for the sake of others. I hope to be a priest who is like the good shepherd: He gives himself for the life of the flock. It is a daunting task, but one that Christ promises will lead to life and deep joy.

The vows are a beautiful and challenging

invitation to allow Christ to conform me more closely to Himself. Our constitutions state that the vows *“are an act of love for the God who first loved us.”* (Constitution 5:43) I am amazed at how the daily reality of the vows shapes me into the more fully free, joyful person God desires me to be. It is not always easy, but it is completely worth it. The vows help me become more authentically myself.

I think one of my greatest joys as a priest will be tied to the relationships I develop with the people I serve and minister to, as well as the witness of brotherhood and community in Holy Cross.

“Union, then, is a powerful lever with which we could move, direct, and sanctify the whole world. We who are disciples ... do not realize all the good we could do for others through union with Jesus Christ.” (Blessed Basil Moreau, Circular Letter 14)

I love this passage from Blessed Moreau because it points to the ideal we in Holy Cross are striving to attain. Our world is desperate for true, deep, life-giving

relationships. So many of us in Holy Cross were drawn by the witness of brotherhood in this community. But it isn't just a nice reality for the members of our community, it is also our mission: To build communities with those we serve that mirror the perfect union we long to share in heaven. I find this quote to provide my life and ministry with a clear objective and goal: To build up the Body of Christ on Earth so that we might participate in the Glory of Christ's living Body in heaven.

In the beginning of my discernment, I had trouble thinking if this were a life God wanted for me, or if it was simply something I wanted to do. So I prayed a lot that the Lord would let me desire what He desires and want what He wants. If you are wrestling with the same feeling, find a spiritual director. Spiritual direction was an important aspect of my own discernment. It helped me to understand where God might be leading me, and how to understand what it means and feels like to be invited to this life.

“

Union, then, is a powerful lever with which we could move, direct, and sanctify the whole world. We who are disciples ... do not realize all the good we could do for others through union with Jesus Christ.”



*Rev. Mr. Gilbrian
Stoy, C.S.C.*

Born: 4/14/1991

Parents: Thomas Stoy and Brigid Fitzgerald, Little Falls, Minn.

College: University of Notre Dame, B.S., 2013

Graduate Study: University of Notre Dame, M.Div., 2019

Entered Formation:
2013, Postulant

First Vows: Aug. 1, 2015

Final Vows: Aug. 31, 2019

Deacon Placement:
Christ the King Parish,
South Bend, Ind.



Rev. Mr. Gilbrian Stoy, C.S.C., Rev. Mr. Vincent Nguyen, C.S.C., Rev. Mr. Zachary Rathke, C.S.C., and Rev. Mr. M. Joseph Pedersen, C.S.C.,
at the Holy Cross Retreat Center in La Porte, Ind.



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Front Cover Photo: M. Joseph Pedersen, C.S.C., Gilbrian Stoy, C.S.C., Zachary Rathke, C.S.C., and Vincent Nguyen, C.S.C., chat together on their way to the Basilica of the Sacred Heart for the Mass of Final Profession.

Back Cover Photo: Deacon Gilbrian Stoy, C.S.C., prepares the chalice at his diaconate ordination.